Good day Senator Fonfara, Senator Frantz, Representative Rojas, Representative Davis and distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

I am Stan Soby, Vice President, Public Policy and External Affairs, at Oak Hill. Oak Hill has been providing services for 125 years and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we support people at every stage of life. Oak Hill has over 20 distinct programs, with 152 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 77 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,700 professionals to successfully help meet the changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year.

I am here to testify regarding H.B. 5587 (Raised), An Act Concerning the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth. The report is a bold and comprehensive approach to helping Connecticut move forward. I am mindful that the Commission has stated that its report needs to be considered in its totality. That said, I wish to specifically comment on two concepts contained in the report: a minimum wage of $15.00 per hour and the conversion of state-operated services to the private sector and make comments directed to the proposed continued refinement of its recommendations.

We support the $15.00 per hour minimum wage as a means to compensate our dedicated staff a fair and living wage for the support they provide to many of Connecticut’s citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This work is both challenging and rewarding. One of the challenges we have as an employer is hiring and maintaining a quality workforce, in a tight workforce market, when many retail employers have already moved to $15.00 per hour. The rates set by the State to nonprofit providers like Oak Hill currently do not support paying our entry level staff at that rate, let alone many of those who have years of dedicated service with us.

This brings me to the other concept, which is linked. We support the continued conversion of State-operated services to private non-profits. This is not an issue of State employees vs. private sector employees. In fact, over 650 direct support staff at Oak Hill are represented by District 1199, which represents their counterparts in State service. Rather, we see this as a matter of efficiency leading to the potential of both savings and supporting more people with intellectual disabilities currently on the waiting list.

We have participated in the conversion process in the past. More recently, we have not found it possible to do so, as the cost caps contained in the Requests for Proposals would only have been workable if we were to pay staff $11.00 per hour. Having a cost structure that would allow us to pay our staff fairly would still result in a savings to the State.

We hope that other bills moving forward, specifically S.B. 400 and H.B 5460, can be considered in conjunction with H.B. 5587 in addressing our concerns for our employees and the people they support and the larger issues faced by the State.